CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND FORTY-EIGHTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 25 May 2000, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Sergei Martynov (Belarus)

(Mr. Gallegos-Chiriboga, Ecuador)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I declare open the 848th plenary meeting of the Conference and the second part of its 2000 session.

I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Ecuador and the Russian Federation. I give the floor to the representative of Ecuador, Ambassador Gallegos-Chiriboga.

Mr. GALLEGOS-CHIRIBOGA (Ecuador) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first I would like to say how pleased my delegation is to see you presiding over the work of the Conference on Disarmament at this session. I am convinced that, with your wealth of experience and great ability, you will move our work forward.

I would also like to convey my gratitude to your predecessors in this demanding post, who have shown remarkable devotion to the work of the Conference. I must also express my thanks to Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, Secretary-General of the Conference, to his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and to all the secretariat officials for their willingness to help.

It is not my intention to repeat what I have already said on 24 June and 12 August 1999, when I once again set before you Ecuador's position on disarmament. Today I must bid farewell to the Conference on Disarmament after three years in which I have had the privilege of representing Ecuador in this negotiating body and taking part in its deliberations together with you my fellow representatives, all people of the highest intellect and diplomatic qualities. I wish to thank you all for the way in which you have cooperated with the delegation of Ecuador, in both a personal and an official capacity.

The current session of the Conference on Disarmament is the first in this new century and I believe, as I prepare to leave this forum, that we should reflect on certain issues and recall that the peoples of the world are calling for peace and for the elimination of weapons of all types, but in particular those of mass destruction. My country is convinced that disarmament is the path to peace and progress. If the money invested in arms were to be used instead for the good of humankind, the world would be a different place.

Since I first arrived in Geneva in June 1997, and until August 1999, Ecuador attended meetings of the Conference on Disarmament as an observer country. Following lengthy consultations and intricate negotiations, the Conference on Disarmament adopted decision CD/1588, whereby Ecuador and four other countries were brought into the Conference on Disarmament as members. I shall always look back on the unanimous approval of Ecuador's membership as acknowledgement of my country's position on disarmament and of its strong presence in the collective efforts of the international community. This was, without any doubt, one of the highlights of my diplomatic career.

Ecuador views its entry into the Conference on Disarmament as the logical conclusion of its firm commitment to disarmament, a commitment that it has expressed in the General Assembly of the United Nations, as well as at the regional level and in bilateral contexts. The lack of consensus on the disarmament agenda endangers peace and international security.

(Mr. Gallegos-Chiriboga, Ecuador)

It is therefore essential that we make progress towards an agreement that will enable us to start the substantive work of this negotiating body. My delegation believes that we should not bog this substantive work down with procedural discussions and debates. Accordingly, this Conference must discharge its mandate as quickly as possible.

This mandate is more like an ethical imperative, more a moral responsibility. It is not a mere political responsibility, based on interests, but rather something which impinges on the very existence of humanity and therefore entails an absolute imperative to place this issue at the very top of the international agenda.

The difficulties encountered in trying to speed up specific negotiations on disarmament demonstrate the lack of agreement on the global agenda and on substantive measures to be taken to ensure security in the post-cold war era. The total failure to reach consensus reflects the uncertainties of a world still trying to find its way in the new international order and to adapt the way it functions to present-day realities. The new political paradigm that has arisen, more than a decade since the collapse of the Berlin wall, has left us still uncertain about the perils and opportunities of this new order. We remain hostages to conflicts and lack of trust, rivalry and clashes, which prevent us making progress towards a more just and equitable world.

My delegation wishes to draw attention again to the content of the communiqué of the Rio Group on the Sixth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to reiterate its support for efforts by the Conference on Disarmament to negotiate a non-discriminatory, multilateral, effective and internationally verifiable international treaty which prohibits the production of fissionable material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, in line with the objectives of non-proliferation and of nuclear disarmament. This major negotiating process must be launched as soon as possible.

My delegation will endeavour as always to see that progress is made and appeals to those countries which are obstructing the difficult path to disarmament to adopt a position of cooperation with the international community, rather than one of confrontation. Let us strive together for the most important goal of humankind: peace.

I am honoured to have been the first Ecuadorian ambassador to have represented our country as a full member of the Conference on Disarmament and to bear witness before you that the people and Government of the Republic of Ecuador are confident that the mechanisms for peaceful negotiation in the Conference on Disarmament will finally banish the use of these instruments of destruction and death.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of Ecuador for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the President and the members of the Conference. I am certain that you will all join me in extending to the distinguished Ambassador of Ecuador, Mr. Gallegos-Chiriboga, our gratitude for his contribution to the work of the Conference over the years that we have been together. We all wish you the very best, to you and your family, in your further duties. Thank you. I now call on the distinguished representative of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Sidorov.

Mr. SIDOROV (Russian Federation) (translated from Russian): Mr. President, the Conference is beginning the work of the second part of its 2000 session against the background of the Sixth Review Conference of the NPT, which has just successfully ended in New York - the first review conference since the adoption in 1995 of the historic decision to extend the NPT indefinitely. Russia highly appreciates the outcome of this forum, which has reaffirmed the significance of the Treaty as a fundamental element of international law promoting global and regional stability and security and posing a sound barrier to the spread of nuclear weapons on the globe. Apart from the non-proliferation dimension, the NPT is a unique instrument fostering nuclear disarmament, as well as international cooperation in using the atom for peaceful purposes. I should like to emphasize that the just concluded Review Conference has vividly demonstrated that the Treaty remains one of the most significant mechanisms in the area of arms control and disarmament, a model for the cooperation of the members of the world community and an example of the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy.

Mr. President, the foreign policy priorities of the Russian Federation belong without question to a philosophy that favours disarmament. In his message to the participants at the NPT Review Conference, the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Putin, unequivocally declared: "Russia is committed to its obligations in the field of nuclear disarmament and intends to continue to abide by them in the conditions of maintaining strategic stability and of the system established over recent decades of disarmament treaties as a basis for further reductions and limitations of strategic offensive arms."

By successively ratifying a number of key disarmament agreements - the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START II), the 1997 New York package of START and ABM-related agreements and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty - Russia has confirmed its readiness in deed, and not just in words, to fulfil the above-mentioned principles. We have circulated our statements to this effect as official documents of the Conference. We are firmly convinced that the implementation of these agreements would constitute a major step towards nuclear non-proliferation.

We should note here that the approval of the START II Treaty by Russia means that only a part of the road has been covered towards launching its practical implementation. It is now up to the United States side to act, by ratifying the 1997 New York package of START and ABM-related agreements. We are convinced that the earliest approval of these documents will serve the interests of both the United States and Russia and will assist in the maintaining of global stability as a whole. In addition, we are prepared to go further towards deeper cuts in nuclear potential. It should be recalled that the levels of nuclear arsenals which it is planned to establish under the START III agreements do not represent absolute limits. We are prepared to consider the reduction of nuclear arsenals to 1,500 warheads. As a result, it should be possible not only to implement nuclear disarmament agreements and initiatives but also to make a new breakthrough, both qualitative and quantitative, in the area of deep reductions in strategic offensive arms. This is the direction we intend to pursue henceforth.

(Mr. Sidorov, Russian Federation)

We fully comprehend the interest shown by many of our partners in the main areas of Russian foreign policy and, in particular, in the role which the nuclear factor plays in our country's military doctrine as adopted in April this year. I want to note that this doctrine is exclusively defensive in nature. I believe that the decisions on START II and the CTBT offer a clear signal to the international community to this effect. I should only add that strengthening the non-proliferation regimes is considered to be one of the main priorities of Russia's national security approach.

In that context, we must note once again the role and significance of the 1972 ABM Treaty as the key element of strategic stability and an important condition for the reduction of strategic offensive weapons. The need to safeguard and strengthen these agreements was unequivocally reaffirmed in the statements by the overwhelming majority of the participants at the NPT Review Conference in New York. Unfortunately, the trend towards the erosion of this agreement and even refusal to honour its main provisions is still evident and even growing stronger.

We should like our partners to be entirely clear on this matter. Further efforts in the area of non-proliferation and disarmament and, first and foremost, nuclear disarmament cannot be considered other than in close connection with the preservation of the ABM Treaty. The meaning and historic role of this document are not confined merely to the sphere of Russian-United States relations. It should be borne in mind that the ABM Treaty underpins the entire modern-day system of arms control agreements. Should one of its component parts be weakened, the entire system would be thrown off balance. In the conditions of globalization, there are countless more interconnections between these various elements. Accordingly, the collapse of the ABM Treaty would in effect disrupt the entire range of disarmament agreements created over the past 30 years and increase the threat of erosion of the regimes of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means.

In response to those who oppose the idea of preserving the ABM Treaty as it stands and to those who justify their position by referring to the growing missile threats from the so-called "rogue States", we should like to stress our deep conviction that the issue of missile proliferation can and must be dealt with without disrupting the ABM Treaty. As counterbalance to the military approach to the issue, we suggest a more constructive option - namely, political and diplomatic measures. We are ready to engage in the broadest possible consultations on this subject with all interested countries. This is precisely what the President of the Russian Federation is aiming at, with his initiative to establish a global missile and missile technology non-proliferation control system. Its phased implementation on a broad voluntary basis would be a step in the right direction.

Thus, there is a real alternative to the collapse of the ABM Treaty and this alternative is steadily becoming more clearly defined. It is based on further deep reductions in nuclear weapons, collective steps to counter the threat of the proliferation of missiles and missile technologies, cooperation concerning non-strategic missile defence systems on the basis of

(Mr. Sidorov, Russian Federation)

the 1997 New York arrangements, a joint analysis of the real extent of the "new" missile threats and the strengthening of confidence-building measures in international affairs. The choice of this particular option will be crucial not only to the survival of the non-proliferation regimes but also to a positive future for world affairs as a whole.

Mr. President, I have already drawn attention on a number of occasions to the sensitivity of the Conference on Disarmament to events in the world at large. The unfavourable development of the international landscape over the last two years has prevented the Conference from starting its substantive work in the most pressing areas of disarmament and arms control. We believe that the successful conclusion of the NPT Review Conference, which has approved the five-year plan of action in the area of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, will give positive impetus to efforts to overcome the stalemate in the work of the Conference on Disarmament. We have reached an important threshold: either we shall succeed in our joint efforts to preserve and multiply the positive effects achieved in the area of disarmament and arms control during the post-cold war period, or we shall slide away from the previously achieved agreements and face the real prospect of chaos and uncontrollable international processes which can only be regulated by the diktat of military power. We do not think that such a prospect is in anybody's interests.

For our part, we should like to reaffirm that the tasks of beginning the elaboration of an international legal regime capable of preventing an arms race in outer space remain among our top priorities. We favour the immediate launching of work on an agreement which would end the further production of weapons-grade fissile materials. We are ready to facilitate in every possible way the earliest resumption of the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on this issue.

As for the discussions in the Conference on nuclear disarmament issues, we have repeatedly demonstrated our flexibility in considering balanced initiatives, genuinely aimed at reaching compromise. We intend to stick to this path.

Mr. President, may I in conclusion assure all participants in the Conference on Disarmament that the Russian delegation stands ready to continue to demonstrate, through the practical steps that it takes, its commitment to the objectives and tasks facing our Conference. It is our intention to continue our constructive cooperation with you and all our colleagues in order to begin substantive work in the Conference, with a view to ensuring steady progress on the road to disarmament and arms control.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): This concludes my list of speakers for today. I see no other delegation wishing to take the floor at this meeting.

As you are aware, now that the Conference on Disarmament has started the second part of its 2000 session, I have embarked on a new round of consultations on its programme of work, in the hope that the momentum created by recent developments during the inter-sessional period will help us overcome the current impasse in the Conference and finally start our substantive work.

(The President)

During these consultations, particular attention is being given to studying the possibilities of resolving issues relating to prevention of an arms race in outer space and to nuclear disarmament.

Many delegations have approached me with the request that they be granted more time to review their positions in the light of developments over the inter-sessional period. Accordingly, I shall continue my consultations and intend to report to the Conference on their progress or outcome at our next plenary meeting.

As Thursday of next week, 1 June 2000, is an official holiday and the Palais des Nations is closed, the next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Tuesday, 30 May 2000, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.